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Orlando Ricardo Menes

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Prairie Schooner Book Prize in Poetry  
Editor Kwame Dawes

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# Fetish: Poems

Orlando Ricardo Menes

University of Nebraska Press | Lincoln and London

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Set in Arno Pro by Laura Wellington.

Designed by J. Vadnais.

for my wife Ivis and  
our two children,  
Valerie and Adrian



From my North of cold whistled in a sepulchral South,  
Her South of pine and coral and coralline sea,  
Her home, not mine, in the ever-freshened Keys . . . .  
—Wallace Stevens, “Farewell to Florida”

In dusk, as though this island lifted, floated  
In Indian baths . . .  
—Hart Crane, “Island Quarry”





# Contents

## *Acknowledgments*      *xi*

### Part 1. *Ars Poetica*

Courtyard of Clotheslines, Angel Hill	3
Golgotha	5
Fetish	7
Mambo	9
Maracas of Rain	10
Aubade: The Charcoal Makers	11
Zvi Mendel	13
The Maximum Leader Addresses His Island Nation	15
<i>Spiderman</i> in Havana	16
Den of the Lioness	17
<i>Libros</i>	19
<i>Refrigeradores</i>	20
Elegy for Great-Uncle Julio, Cane Cutter	21
Tía Gladys, Backroom Seamstress	23
<i>Zafra</i>	24
<i>Ars Poetica</i>	26

### Part 2. *El Cristo de Piedra*

Windfall Antiques	29
Horses	30
Lalo, Peddler	32
Television, a Patient Teacher	34

Sal	35
Village of the Water People	38
<i>El Cristo de Piedra</i>	41
Birthing Adrian	43
Tantrums	44
Braille	45
Pyx	47
Adderall	48
St. Joseph River	49
Ashes	50
Mole	51

### Part 3. The Gringo Called *Ñakak*

<i>Soroche</i>	55
The Gringo Called <i>Ñakak</i>	57
Altiplano	58
Panegyric for the Condor	60
The Devil's Miner	61
The Boy from Chimbote	62
Parable	63
Our Lord of Miracles	64
Top	66
<i>Toro</i>	67
Breakfast with Capitalists	68
Juancito's Wake	69

<i>Notes for Poems</i>	73
------------------------	----

<i>Glossary</i>	75
-----------------	----

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*Callaloo*: “Fetish”

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*The Cincinnati Review*: “Golgotha” and “Libros”

*Crab Orchard Review*: “Sal” and “Aubade: The Charcoal Makers”

*The Evansville Review*: “Tantrums”

*The Fiddlehead*: “Panegyric for the Condor” and “Parable”

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*Shenandoah*: “Ars Poetica” and “Mole”

*Tar River Poetry*: “Pyx” and “Adderall”

*West Branch*: “Courtyard of Clotheslines, Angel Hill”; “Tía Gladys, Backroom Seamstress”; and “Windfall Antiques”

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# Fetish

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# 1. Ars Poetica

Ay, venga, paloma, venga  
y cuénteme usted su pena.  
—Nicolás Guillén, “Balada”

O come, dove, come  
and tell me your sorrows.  
“Ballad”





## Courtyard of Clotheslines, Angel Hill

Though dark clouds hint the kind of rain  
that strafes a city, the long drought has made  
fresh water scarce as milk or gasoline.  
Sand like raw sugar blows from Gabon,  
burying creek and aqueduct alike,  
even agaves wither in tin-can gardens,  
and the women of Angel Hill make do  
with shortages more numerous than bristles  
on a pig. No meat today? They grind  
plantain peels or pickle mop rags. No soap?  
They churn clothes in boiled seawater,  
rig sisal lines to iron balconies that crisscross  
the stone courtyard like a cat's cradle,  
and because Havana Bay is so close,  
wayward gusts wreck the frazzled rope—  
a darned diaper or threadbare blouse  
tossed like some injured bird astray  
in cumuli that scud Caribbean shores.  
While clothes can be replaced by barter  
or theft, those kin lost at sea are grieved  
in shrines of patched photos, wild flowers,  
the clay and cowrie-eyed Elegua, “way opener,”  
mollified by rum-soaked tobacco,  
these desperate men and women, called *escoria*,  
scum, by the government, who take

to the Florida Straits on rafts stitched  
from boards, wire mesh, inner tubes,  
whose hasty provisions fall overboard  
in the high swells, who clamor to María  
or Yemayá for sweet water, calm seas,  
dry land, then plunge into the waves  
when angels whisper from the brine.